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ABSTRACT

Although state governments have a less direct effect on new teachers than do the actions of school administrators and fellow teachers, state standards and the level of financial commitment determine, to a certain extent, the quality of life for teachers. State departments of education can assist first year teachers by: (1) working with teacher education institutions to strengthen the theoretical basis for teacher education and by researching and establishing validated standards and practices; (2) cooperating with educational institutions to establish experimental programs that assist new teachers to make the transition from the college laboratory to the public school classroom; and (3) creating conditions conducive to teacher job satisfaction. States usually predicate approval of teacher education programs on responsiveness to established standards. However, good quality cannot be mandated or legislated, but is a result of commitment and hard work. (FG)

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State Agency Involvement in Teacher Induction

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education
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STATE AGENCY INVOLVEMENT IN TEACHER INDUCTION

New teachers need support. That support can and should come from a number of sources. State agencies serve as one of those potential support sources. Their willingness to serve as an advocate for educational change and to provide the leadership necessary for sustaining educational excellence has real import for the self-perceptions and behaviors of teachers as they progress through their first year of teaching.

A word about state departments and their role may be a necessary precursor to considering how these units might directly or indirectly provide support for first year teachers. Most states protect the interests of the public by promulgating standards. Standards are relatively broad and flexible. They are intended to provide latitude for program and curriculum development. States typically predicate approval for teacher education programs based on responsiveness to established standards.

"School personnel," notes Freeman (1977), "act as agents of the state to ensure that its interest in socializing children is realized" (p. 83). Teachers are the primary socializing agents and first year teachers, quite obviously, are newest at confronting the responsibility of ensuring that children learn the behaviors and survival skills necessary for living in a democratic society.

States are interested in what happens in the lives of teachers, particularly new teachers, because it is teachers who fulfill the responsibility delegated to the state. Even though states have much less direct affect on new teachers than the actions of school administrators and fellow teachers, state standards and their level of financial commitment determine, to a certain extent at least, a quality of life for teachers.

With this in mind, let's examine more closely how state agencies can positively affect what happens in the life of a new teacher. I will suggest three ways in which state departments of education can assist first year teachers as they embark on their pedagogical careers.

First, state agencies should work with teacher education institutions to strengthen the professional educational component of the preservice curriculum. Like most nice ideas, strengthening teacher education is easier to promote than to accomplish. At the very least, however, colleges should be encouraged to develop principles, concepts or theories (in Ohio we call them knowledge, skills, attitudes and values) and then undertake procedures for validating those practices. States like Ohio have been successful at specifying process, but we have been far less successful in encouraging (and enabling) institutions to validate what they do.

Advocating the validation of practices and principles should not be perceived as an endorsement of competency based programs (e.g., CBTE and PBTE). Rather, it is an insistence

that we begin to focus on what Miller and Young (1981) term the integration crisis. That is, education has a sort of trade school image because it has been unable to establish a common knowledge base or conceptual understanding of what is fundamental to teaching competence. We must begin to demonstrate that what we know has an effect on what we do. If this is clearly established, teachers, particularly first year teachers, will approach the teaching act with much more confidence. Teacher education will be viewed less as a ritual and more as a professional necessity, and new teachers will have greater confidence in the skills they possess when they stand in front of a class for the first time.

The first step toward developing a theoretical basis for teacher education in general and standards in particular may be achieved through some type of research or investigatory partnership between states and colleges/universities. The beginnings of such a partnership may be observed in Ohio where a funded research entity (the Ohio Study Council for Research and Evaluation) has been formed to support research and evaluation in teacher education. The Council has recommended funding for several projects including one study that focuses on identifying and validating generic teaching concepts.

Secondly, states should work cooperatively with educational institutions to establish experimental programs that assist new teachers in the transition from the world of the college campus to the reality of the school classroom. One immediately

thinks of extended teacher education programs with professional education occurring during the fifth or even sixth year of the teachers' professional training. Such programs may or may not be an answer, but certainly a variation on this extended year theme seems appropriate. There are a variety of internship and induction programs that may be possible, and states could help bridge the gap that is often evident between what teacher educators desire and public schools require. They could bring the constituencies together and provide the environment, if not the funds, necessary to consider possibilities for the development and implementation of experimental induction programs.

First year teachers would feel much more comfortable if they saw their growth in evolutionary terms. Graduating from a teacher education institution is only one step, a first step, in the process of assimilating the teaching act. The fact that most educators have polarized teacher education into preservice and inservice does not help the neophyte understand the reflective nature of teaching. Teachers learn very quickly to perceive the process of learning to teach as a progression of courses and workshops, rather than a process for understanding how to solve the learning problems of students. Courses and workshops are simply the vehicles for presenting concepts and ideas necessary for solving the myriad classroom problems. Perhaps if states (and educational institutions) were less enthralled with course counting and more concerned with engendering conceptual understanding in teacher education graduates, new teachers would find the first year less frightening. They

may even be able to see the initial teaching experience as an opportunity to learn rather than an event to survive.

Finally, state agencies should work with schools and school districts to create the conditions conducive to teacher job satisfaction. Fuller and Bown (1975) noted that new teachers are primarily concerned with survival. Other studies on the first year of teaching have supported this assertion (Ryan et al., 1980). We appear to be entering a time of political conservatism when education may not be provided with the financial resources, proportionately speaking at least, evidenced in the past. Cuts in federal and state funds may have a significant effect on the nature of classroom life. New teachers may find themselves trying to survive in classes of forty rather than in classes of twenty-five. They may find themselves existing, in a literal sense, on inadequate incomes. The implications for the quality of instruction teachers can provide given such conditions and the quality of life they can experience are apparent.

With added fiscal constraints, new teachers may also receive induction in schools that have ever increasing bureaucratic orientations. In bureaucratic schools production, efficiency, and formality are preeminent (Sergiovanni and Starrett, 1979). Job satisfaction is less important than job efficiency. The bureaucratic orientation may be necessary for survival but the consequences are frightening vis-a-vis the quality of personnel deciding to remain in education and the types of experiences they are afforded while in the classroom.

Given that available funds may be limited and that parsimony may induce a certain bureaucratic tendency, state agencies may need to assist administrators in creating school organizational environments that have more professional orientations (i.e., are adaptive and emphasize job satisfaction), yet are still able to sustain certain necessary levels of centralization and fiscal responsibility. State agencies may assist, in particular, by acting as an intermediary between the demands of the public and the needs of teachers and students. State leadership in achieving greater professionalism may necessitate more reflection and less reaction. Educational fads may need to be tempored by states through careful attention to the efficacy of proposed programs to meet the learning needs of students and pedagogical and personal needs of teachers (particularly first year teachers).

These three areas, then, the development of a theoretically sound basis for teacher practices, the establishment of programs to assist teachers as they move from the college laboratory to the public school classroom, and the maintenance of professional school organizational climates, form the foundation for potential state agency involvement. Such activities or conditions would be consistent correlates with what we know about the first year of teaching.

State agencies are concerned with quality, yet quality cannot be mandated or legislated (Atkin, 1980). Quality manifests itself because of commitment and hard work. New teachers will begin to exhibit that commitment if state agencies, along

with others, work to establish classroom conditions consistent with the needs of teachers in particular and with the profession in general.

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